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AUTHOR Bailin, Michael A.
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ABSTRACT

This testimony of the President of Public/Private Ventures (PPV) in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) is on the subject of designing effective youth services programs, particularly in light of the PPV's experience with its program, Summer Training and Education Program (STEP). Following a description of the background for this and similar programs, the STEP's format and purpose, to deter early school-leaving, are described. The program's results are presented briefly, and a series of lessons culled from the STEP experience is presented. The first set of lessons include the following: (1) improvements in the reading, mathematics, and life skills of young adolescents can be accomplished in a short time; (2) innovative programs can be replicated with consistent practices and results across large numbers of varying locations; (3) accomplishment require a business-like approach to investments in innovation development; and (4) short-term programs are unlikely to produce long-lasting impacts by themselves. A set of broader lessons is also discussed including the following: (1) the search for quick fixes must be abandoned; (2) long-term results require short-term programs and larger institutional changes; (3) investing in changes requires a business-like approach; and (4) the best roles and responsibilities for Federal, state, local, and private sector actors must be found. (JB)

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Testimony of
MICHAEL A. BAILIN, PRESIDENT
PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES, PHILADELPHIA, PA
Before the
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
HUMAN RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE
Friday, March 6, 1992

I am Michael A. Bailin, President of Public/Private Ventures, a national not-for-profit program development and research organization based in Philadelphia. With funding from the public and private sectors, we seek effective, practical ways to increase the skills, opportunities and self-sufficiency of disadvantaged youth.

We pursue this goal in a number of ways. Our primary approach involves designing model programs, testing them in the field and using what we learn to help both program operators and policymakers improve services for the young people we count on to contribute to society as adults.

I am here today to share with you conclusions and lessons from recent work P/PV has completed, and has published in a report titled Anatomy of a Demonstration. Its lessons, I believe, will help us think more clearly about the design of effective youth services. The work it describes--a national demonstration research project in which we have been engaged for eight years--has traced the impacts of a novel summer program on the lives of almost 2,500 youth--a program, I should add, that P/PV has replicated successfully in more than 100 communities across the U.S.

From such a complex, long-lived effort you would expect varied results that represent various shades of good and not so good news, and so it is with the findings I will share. Our experience has taught us critical lessons about how programs can succeed, and how they can be adopted at scale with consistent results. It also has reinforced some of the serious limitations of those programs, and suggested changes in direction for future planning and policy.

There are sobering points to relate, yet I regard our message as essentially positive. P/PV's work--and that of other organizations in the field--provides us now with the experience, many of the tools, and the perspective to make national investments in youth pay off. Not without significant changes, and not without cost, but, as I will describe, we can at least begin to map out more promising directions to pursue.

Most assuredly, we must grapple with problems whose scope is as alarming as ever. Today, as in the early 1980s, a fifth of all children under 18 are poor, and more than a fifth of preschoolers live in families with incomes below the poverty line. Both these proportions will likely rise by the end of the decade. In addition, a growing number of children live in families headed by a woman alone; the poverty rates and the receipt of welfare among such families remain quite high.

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At the same time, previously rising high school graduation rates have leveled off: since the mid-80s, at least one in five young people has failed to finish high school, thus risking both high unemployment and lifetime earnings losses. Research suggests that high school dropouts lower their expected earnings by one-third compared to peers who do graduate.

The interaction of poverty, failure to finish high school, and failure to make a firm connection with the labor force is strong; the three factors indeed hover near 20 percent for all children, and higher for minority youth. Thus, we are all at risk: of losing one-fifth of our young population.

The effects of this loss on the lives of individuals, on the texture of the American social fabric, on our productivity and on our international economic status are well-documented and well-known. We read of them in the papers every day.

All of us here today also are familiar with efforts to reduce the numbers of lost youth--efforts like Head Start, the Job Corps and JOBSTART, as well as P/PV's Summer Training and Education Program. And while these programs sometimes do make a difference, their effects mostly pale in the face of the problems. It seems fair to wonder where the headway is. Interestingly, we're also increasingly encountering polls suggesting growing willingness among taxpayers to direct additional monies into targeted, effective education and youth services. But for that actually to happen, we must confront two hard questions: Why don't we see more progress? And what can we do to increase the chances that we will?

I want to address those questions today from two complementary perspectives. The first is Public/Private Ventures' recently completed review of two decades of research on youth programs, to be published by the Department of Labor later this year. The second is a comprehensive review of P/PV's eight-year experience with the Summer Training and Education Program, a national demonstration program we have overseen from pilot through replication and long-term research. The results of that review are presented in a report called Anatomy of a Demonstration, which is being published today.

RESEARCH DEMONSTRATIONS AND STEP

STEP is one of a dozen or so special efforts aimed both at producing knowledge and assisting youth launched over the past two decades. Called research demonstrations, these special projects are usually supported by a consortium of public and philanthropic institutions, and are modeled after experiments in the physical sciences.

The intervention models themselves are carefully designed with specific aims in mind, and wherever possible the research employs random assignment, control groups, scrupulous data collection and analysis, and long-term follow-up to produce the most conclusive and credible knowledge possible.

These demonstrations represent our one reliable, nonpolitical source of knowledge about existing social interventions and about future policies and initiatives that seek to reverse the downward spiral of our nation's children. Their consistency in producing results acceptable to the scientific-minded of all political persuasions is noteworthy. They are regularly cited in the course of drafting and amending legislation affecting such programs as Head Start, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), job training, community service and the Job Corps.

STEP was one such research demonstration. It received considerable national attention during its life; and its short-term findings were available early on, and played an important and useful role when Congress voted to strengthen the summer youth component of the Job Training Partnership Act with a mandate for local communities to provide academic remediation to eligible youth.

STEP'S Purpose

STEP's primary thrust was to deter early school-leaving, a chronic problem that results in poor labor market performance and low incomes. While the reasons young people drop out of school are numerous, varied, and often interconnected, STEP's designers identified two proximate causes that a research demonstration strategy could address within the confines of available public resources: school failure, particularly poor performance in basic skills; and early parenting, which is not only linked to early school departure and diminished work prospects for both young mothers and fathers, but also seems likely to lower the prospects for their children.

In its conception, STEP did not address the deeper causes of dropping out, which other research indicates are related to low family income, dropout siblings, home environments not conducive to learning, negative school experiences, behavior problems or the desire for permanent work.

Indeed, the research data and analysis available, both when STEP was designed and now--eight years later--provide little or no direction on how to address these more fundamental causes: which or how many must be affected to change a youth's decision to drop out; the age at which intervention might prove most effective; or how sustained an intervention must be to produce effects.

STEP's focus on proximate causes was dictated not only by the limited research evidence on causation, but by feasibility as well. The program was designed late in 1983, when funds for social programs had been sharply reduced and there was scant political momentum for creating large-scale or resource-intensive interventions for poor youth.

The STEP Demonstration

These considerations led P/PV to focus on the summer as the period for an intervention that would capitalize on the need of low-income youth for both income and added support as they move from intermediate to high schools and approach the legal age of dropping out. In most communities, the summer is idle space for youth; no one institution owns it. Hence it seemed an ideal target of opportunity.

P/PV also chose to make use of an existing, nationwide institutional vehicle, the Summer Youth Employment and Training Program (SYETP), authorized by Title IIB of the Job Training Partnership Act, which has existed in various forms since 1965. If STEP succeeded, we felt, its connection to a national program would amplify prospects for later adoption on a wider scale. SYETP was then--and is now--the nation's largest youth employment program, providing minimum-wage work experience--usually in isolation from other program elements--for some 600,000 youth each year.

STEP made use of this programmatic resource in several novel ways. First, it connected work experience for two summers and made it available to 14- and 15-year-olds--a younger group than is usually served by SYETP. It enriched that work experience strategically, adding half-time academic remediation in reading and math, two specially created curricula, advanced teaching methods, computer-assisted instruction, and high-engagement classes focusing on responsible social and sexual behavior, drug use, careers and community involvement.

The demonstration was an intensive, complex, long-term and ultimately successful effort. It required the support of a consortium of 11 funding agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services. It took eight years to complete; and $12 million to develop, install in five cities, and evaluate.

In those five sites, P/PV successfully randomized 4,800 14- and 15-year-olds into treatment and control groups, and implemented a consistently operated program intervention, as evidenced by independent field audits and in-program outcome data. STEP youth--all below grade academically and one-third of whom had been held back in school--had high attendance rates in the program and a high return rate (75%) for the second summer.

STEP Demonstration Results

As with the demonstration itself, the findings are complex and multifaceted. I will summarize some key results, but more want to focus on the large lessons we have drawn from this and other demonstrations in the youth field.

The short-term impacts on youth who participated in the full STEP program, as compared with control youth who worked full time on SYETP jobs, were consistently impressive in reading, math and

TABLE I

KEY FEATURES OF THE STEP DEMONSTRATION, 1985-1988	
TARGET GROUP	14-15-year olds, JTPA-eligible, poor school performers
DURATION	Two summers, with modest service during school year
PARTICIPATING SITES	Boston, MA; Seattle WA; Fresno, CA; Portland, OR; San Diego, CA
MAJOR PROGRAM COMPONENTS	Half-time work, half-time classroom focused on basic and life skills
INNOVATIVE FEATURES	Specially designed and taught curricula dealing with both academic and life skills; two-summer duration
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	Approximately 4800 in the overall demonstration sample, 1500 in each of 3 cohorts
RESEARCH DESIGN	Randomized treatments (2400) and controls (2400); short-term pre-post testing and questionnaire measures; long-term follow-up
SHORT-TERM FINDINGS	Consistent short-term impacts on reading, math scores; large knowledge gains in life skills/sexuality issues

SOURCE: Public/Private Ventures, Summer Training and Education Program, published reports, 1986-1988

knowledge of responsible social and sexual behavior. STEP treatments had test scores that were approximately a half-grade higher than controls in both math and reading, and showed substantial improvement in their knowledge of pregnancy prevention--all generated in a six- to eight-week period during each of two summers. Some key indicators of STEP's population, and its robust short-term effects, are summarized in Tables II and III.

STEP was also successful--and this point is well worth noting--in generating sustained enthusiasm among the program's state and local operators, which included employment/training agencies, public school systems and community-based organizations working together. All five demonstration sites have continued the program since completion of the demonstration's operational phase in 1988.

Indeed, one of the major dimensions of STEP's success was in replication. More than 100 communities around the country have replicated STEP, with intensive, well-designed technical assistance and materials from P/PV. Thus far, replication sites have served 20,000 additional youth, producing test score increases equalling, and often exceeding, those of the original five demonstration sites.

These successes seemed to confirm the original hope that STEP could significantly improve the longer-term schooling, income and parenting outcomes for youth over what they would otherwise experience. The program seemed to do its work with admirable consistency, even when the rigorous conditions of the demonstration process were relaxed in replication sites. At one level, at least, STEP truly "worked" and worked well.

But long-term research completed by P/PV last year shows that the impressive summer impacts did not hold up once youth left STEP and returned to their regular school and life routines. And several years after finishing the STEP program, treatment youth were no better off than the control youth who had summer jobs only. STEP youth had dropped out of school at the same rate and showed no improvement in early labor market performance or reduction in rates of teen pregnancies. In short, a positive and successful experience in work, education and life skills instruction over two summers was not sufficient to alter the life trajectories of poor urban youth.

Indeed, the problems of these youth, as they emerge in the STEP follow-up research, paint a bleak picture of what life is like for disadvantaged youth in America today:

Among those who were 17 and 18 years old when we interviewed them, both treatments and controls, 15 percent were neither working nor in school, 22 percent of the young women had children and 64 percent of these young mothers were receiving public assistance in some form.

For treatment and control youth who had enrolled in STEP a year earlier and were 18 and 19 years old at the time of our interviews, one-fourth were neither in school nor working, one-third were single parents, and three-fourths of the young mothers

Tables II and III

had been on public assistance at some time during the previous several years.

I do not wish to minimize the significance of STEP's lack of long-term impacts. But a large set of messages is to be found among the demonstration's complex findings--positive and sobering alike. A balanced interpretation must include both.

Most important, it is a mistake to conclude from our experience that "nothing works." The deeper truth, I believe, lies elsewhere: in the stubborn and deep-rooted problems that today's poor youth face, problems that are not so readily swept away. Yet we have learned much about their nature, and our capacity to respond to them. And it is these large lessons, both hopeful and serious, that I want to present today.

STEP'S LESSONS

Public/Private Ventures draws four critical lessons from the STEP experience, lessons that resonate with findings from other demonstration work of the past.

1. **It is possible to produce improvements in the reading, math and life skills of young adolescents in a short period of time.**

The STEP research shows, powerfully and unequivocally, that test scores can be improved in short time periods at reasonable operating costs. STEP youth ended the summer with reading and math scores one-half grade higher than those of controls in a program that cost just $600 per youth per summer above the costs of the existing summer jobs program. Moreover, STEP youth demonstrated clear improvement in their knowledge of the consequences of teen parenting and the importance of avoiding it, and their understanding of the need to make good decisions that influence the future.

The STEP experience and data counter the view that programs cannot have positive effects on teenagers who have already experienced failure in school and the debilitating effects of an environment poor in resources and opportunity. With the right focus, the right tools, appropriate technical support and adequately conducted programs, we can produce beneficial changes at measurable levels. These are experiences that we can build on--and in fact must build on.

2. **Innovative programs can be replicated with consistent practices and results across large numbers of varying locations.**

Although STEP was tested in five locations, an unprecedented replication effort funded by the Department of Labor, Exxon Corporation, General Motors Corporation and The Rockefeller Foundation made it possible to start STEP programs in more than 100 additional areas of the country. As I mentioned earlier, the

young people in the programs did at least as well during the summer as those in the demonstration--regardless of whether they lived in cities or rural areas, and no matter what their demographic profiles.

Effective social programs are viewed by many as idiosyncratic and unique, dependent on exceptional local leaders and incapable of being brought to scale. The STEP experience suggests that this view is in many ways incorrect. With care and foresight, with the right **kinds** of investment and effort, social programs can be widely and effectively adopted, building on local strengths and amplifying them with solidly developed new tools to aid youth. STEP is a blueprint for such efforts. We can use its lessons to better programming, and better the chances for youth.

3. These accomplishments require a businesslike approach to investments in innovation development.

Some 2,400 youngsters initially benefitted from STEP's two-summer combination of work, academic remediation and life skills instruction in the demonstration sites; about 20,000 more have had similar gains in the replication sites. These numbers are not large when compared with the 600,000 low-income youth enrolled each year in the summer youth jobs program. Yet they are enormous when compared with the usual research demonstration or, indeed, with the many similarly promising small programs that achieve notice, but not scale. How did the STEP effort succeed?

To create and test the model itself required, first, a complex funding consortium that included the Departments of Labor and of Health and Human Services, The Ford Foundation and nine other private and corporate foundations. These funders were willing to invest in research and innovation at the critical developmental stage. Their investment produced the novel teaching approaches and materials that learning theory indicated would generate improvements, trained public school teachers to carry out those innovations, and provided a solid blueprint for widespread replication.

Developing these innovations required an initial investment of just about half a million dollars. Installing them cost about $15,000 per site; ongoing training, quality control and materials improvement cost another $10 to $15 thousand per site during the initial two years of operation. These were **investments**--fruitful ones, I believe.

Operating STEP also required, second, the willingness of localities to totally change the way they did summer programming. Accomplishing the transition from jobs alone to a combination of work, schooling and life skills involved the establishment of relationships among agencies not previously in the habit of working together, staff retraining, creative financing and blending disparate funding streams.

Financing and developing further innovation in STEP continues to this day. With the generous support of Kraft General Foods, we are now working with replication sites to find ways of

reinforcing the STEP experience during the school year and tying the project to broader school reform efforts.

These kinds of costs and operational adjustments are often not adequately taken into account in dealing with social issues. They are the price of change. Yet taken together they are not unaffordable. Quite to the contrary, they remain well within the reach--and interest--of more than 100 communities throughout the country.

Third, the STEP success reflected an element seldom found in our work: a business perspective. Front-end investments in developing the right innovations; an entrepreneurial sense of how new techniques can be packaged, disseminated, and flexibly applied in a variety of local settings; care and intelligence in training new cadres of users; management information and quality control--all are hallmarks of successful business practice. These practices are now uncommon in public-sector programs, but should not be. Appropriately used, they can produce success of a significant kind.

4. Short-term programs like STEP, even when they have positive short-term effects, are unlikely to produce long-lasting impacts by themselves.

STEP's strength was its highly organized, intensive and controlled involvement in each youth's life during the summer. But once that involvement ended, there was no vehicle to reinforce and continue the positive effects. Over time, they dissipated.

STEP filled a critical gap in the lives of disadvantaged young people--the summer. It provided them with an important introduction to the experience of working, protected them from the summer learning losses typical of their peers, and increased their knowledge of the dangers of early parenting. But there it ended.

It seems fair to conclude that STEP wasn't preventive enough. Within the constraints of P/PV's original design and mandate we could not reach down to the younger years--to serve 12- and 13-year-olds whose lives might have been more easily shaped. Nor, in a single program, could we offer family supports, year-round supports and other services. We positioned STEP as early in youngsters' lives, and offered as intensive a regimen of help, as we could; still, it wasn't enough.

Just as significant, in assessing what STEP could not do, was the lack of reinforcement for STEP's gains. One program--whatever its own effects--will seldom produce effects that are deep and durable. Success must build on success for youth to continue to grow and achieve. After STEP, there was too little secure, appropriate footing to permit youngsters to advance.

The footing wasn't there because STEP's sole focus was on changing the youngsters. It couldn't change their environment, or the schools to which they would return. It could produce change in the youth themselves--but only for a time.

These lessons, in light of our overall experiences in the social policy field, are not surprising. Yet they force us to confront a fact we would just as soon avoid: there are no magic bullets in our business. Ten years ago, our expectations may have been higher--and more naive. Today, we must finally lower them to a realistic level, then think and act constructively in light of what we know.

THE BROADER LESSONS OF STEP AND OTHER DEMONSTRATION RESEARCH

Indeed, we can find evidence of this fact in other research demonstrations and evaluations carried out on youth initiatives over the past two decades. In our review, conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor, we found a depressingly consistent record. The interventions tested have rarely produced long-term impacts of magnitude.

The strongest results in the AFDC demonstrations, for example, do not include reductions in poverty levels or need for public assistance. Recent research on Head Start shows fading effects as the children move through school. Alone among interventions, the Job Corps has succeeded. But it seems altogether fair to wonder if its successes do not stem from removing youngsters from the environments that other programs must compete with--too often unsuccessfully.

Many of these programs succeed in their major task--giving kids a boost. These "boosts" are important; but they aren't enough for youth from poor families in poor neighborhoods going to poor schools, with few opportunities, few role models, few avenues for positive reinforcement. Environmental negatives soon overwhelm any boost, whether administered at age one, three, five or 14.

Must we then conclude that nothing works? That these programs and initiatives are useless and should be dropped? That only by removing poverty and all its attendant ills can these children be helped to succeed? Obviously that would be ideal. But one lesson we all have learned is that we simply haven't the tools yet to make all that happen.

Nonetheless, I believe the picture to be far from hopeless. Our research demonstrations--like STEP--have produced important findings. Together with experience we have gained in the field--and some healthy doses of common sense--we're far more capable now of finding guideposts for our efforts to assist poor youth, whether in reforming schools, offering special programs and social services to youth in poor communities, or making juvenile justice agencies more effective in rehabilitation.

The answer to my questions, then, is this: some things do work; we need more of them; and we need to build on them realistically. Our own work--which reflects the work of many others in our field--leads me to the following conclusions on how to proceed:

1. We must abandon the search for quick fixes. We must give up our expectations that single programs like Head Start and STEP

can, by brief inoculation, overcome the intense and ever-present negative influences that surround poor children. Real progress demands realistic expectations.

Yet we must not lose sight of the useful and positive effects we can achieve with sound short-term strategies. STEP and other programs can produce beneficial effects. We can raise test scores, increase knowledge and boost attachment to the labor force--in the short term. These are real, demonstrable and valuable capacities. They have potential, which must be clearly recognized, reinforced and built upon.

2. Achieving long-term results requires a strategy that incorporates both short-term programs and larger institutional changes. Our task is to take what we have learned about producing short-term gains, apply those principles in other settings, and array and connect short-term successes in ways that can alter the future for disadvantaged young people.

Successful transition to adulthood depends on having a sequence of positive experiences as one matures. For too many poor youth, such experiences are few, while the fallow periods in between are all too frequent.

Thus our greatest untapped opportunity for effective short-term programs may lie in what I call the "gap periods" in youngsters' lives. The long and now-often-vacant summer break, the unstructured after-school hours and weekends, the floundering period between high school and settling into a career for non-college-bound youth all appear to be fertile, largely unexplored avenues for intervention. No one owns or uses them now, and their potential is largely wasted.

Lest this all seem too general and abstract, let me offer a few specific examples. STEP, a program with the kind of useful short-term effects I spoke of earlier, was one that targeted summer--an important gap in most adolescents' lives. Head Start is very much like it--solid effects in the short term and built into a critical phase of a youngster's life. Twenty-five years ago, there was an early childhood gap; now--for many youngsters--there is Head Start.

With STEP, we are now reaching for the next stage--how to make the program a more integral part of the school year, use its effective techniques more widely in schooling, and thus perhaps be a small lever in local school reform efforts. Similarly, new Head Start efforts are looking to extend their reach to support young children in a variety of ways through their early school years.

That is one aspect of what we must do--use solid programs to span gaps in children's lives and over time alter existing institutional arrangements in useful ways. In public education, we see related examples: the widespread adoption of James Comer's School Development Program and the Essential Schools model of Theodore Sizer are examples of institutional rearrangement from within--new models of school change centered on process

and actors, but aimed ultimately at making institutions more child-centered and thus more effective.

There are other examples of these themes that common sense suggests are important, yet that we haven't yet tried. One is to link and more fully engage the schools with community-sponsored programs, those run by churches, community centers and nonprofit youth organizations. Individually, these programs and institutions now serve important but narrow purposes--with numerous gaps between. Better linked, they offer a far richer web of opportunities to close the gap periods that now stand empty in young people's lives.

Over the past two decades, an enormous amount of academic work has been done in fields like cognitive development, adolescent development and developmental psychology. Emerging work in these areas stresses the critical role of supportive institutions, the connectedness of experience and learning, caring environments, and the fundamental need for adult interest and attention to children. We need now to find ways to try out these ideas formally, and to build this knowledge into youth programs and youth-serving institutions if they are to matter in the long term.

Finally, my own common-sense perspective returns again and again to the need for more adult contact with youth. We must support and develop many more opportunities and mechanisms than we now have to connect youngsters with caring adults in the schools and institutions in their communities. Adults need to provide attention, encouragement and support--the human supports that struggling, often dysfunctional families are unable to provide their youth, but that in well-functioning families and communities, naturally enrich the lives of children.

3. We must take a businesslike approach to investing in these changes. They require ample funding on the front end, in innovations and in changing people and institutions. The lessons of business success apply here: we must--at adequate levels--make investments in change if we want change and improvement to come about. These investments need not be prohibitively large; STEP's were, in the context of their results, quite modest. Yet these front-end expenses may yield programs with far more affordable operating costs, and far better results.

The responsibility for such investments is properly, I believe, that of our governing institutions. Rhetoric did not build highways, dams or the first space shuttle; it will not build a system of services for our children. We must invest--intelligently and wisely, to be sure--but we must invest.

4. We must find--and combine--the most fruitful roles for federal, state, local and private-sector actors and responsibilities. Typically, this nation alternates between the rhetoric of federal dictation and the rhetoric of local control; between calls for government action and private-sector contributions. Neither works in isolation from the other.

The STEP demonstration combined funding from the federal government and foundations to develop and install its innovations; it capitalized on state and local staff, talent and dedication to operate the program well; and in P/PV it had a private intermediary that could gather the expertise and resources necessary to develop innovations and work with local organizations outside of a bureaucratic, regulatory setting.

This model of collaboration has been used before to get important tasks done in America. We need to revive it now, at a scale commensurate with the crisis our youth now face. Single programs, we know, cannot do the job alone; neither can any single institution solve the complex problems our youth face, and that we must solve.

These are not easy issues. But I see hope in the lessons we have learned, and the directions in which they point. Our task now must be to take seriously what we have learned, and use the lessons wisely, energetically and successfully to serve the nation's youth.

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